



**NORTH DAKOTA**  
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:  
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### **State Health Department Reports Recent Hantavirus-Related Death**

BISMARCK, N.D. – A western North Dakota resident recently died as a result of hantavirus, according to Kirby Kruger, state epidemiologist for the North Dakota Department of Health. Ryan Havelka, 29, of Hettinger, N.D., died Aug. 5, 2008, after a brief illness with hantavirus.

The North Dakota Department of Health is charged with keeping specific information about individuals confidential; however, Patty Havelka, the victim's widow, asked the department to discuss her husband's case in order to educate the public about the seriousness of hantavirus disease. Mrs. Havelka also participated with the department in a news conference held today.

"We are saddened about the death of this young adult from hantavirus infection, and we extend our sympathy to the family," Kruger said. "Unfortunately, this is a tragic reminder of just how deadly hantavirus can be and why it is so important we take every precaution to prevent infection."

This is the tenth case of hantavirus and the sixth death reported in North Dakota since the virus was discovered in the southwestern United States in 1993. People who contract hantavirus do so through contact with rodents and rodent-infested buildings. In the majority of cases, the exact means of contracting the disease is never determined.

Hantavirus infections in people result in serious respiratory illness with a high death rate. There is no cure for the disease. People usually get hantavirus by inhaling the virus found in the saliva, urine and droppings of mice. The virus becomes airborne when urine and droppings are disturbed.

"Although hantavirus infections are rare in North Dakota, keeping mice out of homes and work buildings is important in the prevention of this deadly disease," Kruger said.

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*Visit the health department home page at [www.ndhealth.gov](http://www.ndhealth.gov).*

Follow these steps to avoid contact with rodents by keeping them out of buildings:

- Seal small cracks or holes in the building. Dime-sized holes are all mice need to get in.
- Make food and water inaccessible to rodents by keeping food in rodent-proof containers.

If mice do gain access, follow these steps to trap them:

- Use spring-loaded traps to catch mice, and check the traps on a regular basis.
- To dispose of a trapped rodent or a trap:
  - Wear rubber, vinyl or nitrile gloves.
  - Spray the rodent and trap with a household disinfectant or bleach solution.
  - Place the rodent and the trap into two plastic bags, sealing each one.
  - Place the bags into a covered trash container.
  - Disinfect your gloves before removing, and wash hands after removing gloves
- For severe rodent infestation, contact a professional for eradication and clean up.

Take these precautions outdoors to reduce ideal mice habitat close to homes or work buildings:

- Keep wood piles away from the home and raise them off the ground.
- Clear brush, grass, abandoned vehicles, tires, rock or brick piles from around the house.
- Store pet food, grain and other “food” in rodent-proof containers.
- Keep garbage in rodent-proof, sealed containers.
- Set traps to catch mice in outbuildings and in sheltered areas within 100 feet of the home.

Follow these steps to clean up rodent urine, droppings, nests and contaminated surfaces:

- For buildings that have been closed up, open doors and windows to air out the building before cleaning starts.
- Wear rubber, vinyl or nitrile gloves.
- Do not vacuum or sweep contaminated surfaces or floors. This may cause the virus to get into the air. Dust masks that you buy at hardware stores do not offer adequate protection.
- Thoroughly wet the contaminated surfaces, including droppings and urine, with a household disinfectant approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or bleach solution made up of 1 and ½ cups of bleach per gallon of water.
- Once everything is wet with the disinfectant or bleach solution, use a paper towel to remove the droppings and other contaminated materials.
- Mop or sponge the area with disinfectant or bleach solution.
- Disinfect countertops, drawers, cupboards and other durable surfaces using a disinfectant or bleach solution.
- Disinfect gloves before removing, and wash hands with soap and water after removing.

For more information about hantavirus, contact the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180 or 701.328.2378. A fact sheet about hantavirus is available on the department’s website at [www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Documents/faqs/Hantavirus.pdf](http://www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Documents/faqs/Hantavirus.pdf).

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